

HEALTHCARE INTERPRETATIONS TASK FORCE INTERPRETATION

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Code: NFPA 101, All editions prior to the 1988 edition.

Background: Prior to the 1988 edition of the *Life Safety Code*, the code only permitted doors in the required means of egress of a health care facility to be locked with time delay type locks or in mental health facilities with keys. The more recent editions of the code now refer to the clinical needs of the patient and do not limit key locking to just mental health facilities.

For example, today's nursing homes have Alzheimer's units or wings. Alzheimer's is not a mental health condition and was not identified prior to the mid 1980's other than through vague terminology such as "senility" or "dementia".

AHJ's using editions of the *Life Safety Code* prior to 1988 are not permitting nursing homes to lock Alzheimer's units other than with time delay locks (special locks) because they are not mental health facilities. Time delay locks are totally inadequate for Alzheimer's patients. Alzheimer's patients have no idea that their pressing on the panic bar is the cause for the alarm and the locks eventually open without staff interceding. The constant alarming only causes the staff to disconnect the systems.

Question: Was it the intent of the Life Safety Code prior to the 1988 Edition to permit doors in the means of egress of health care facilities to be locked where the clinical needs of the patients required specialized security, provided staff can unlock the doors at all times?

Answer: YES. Locking of these doors is acceptable provided:

1. The clinical needs of the patients require specialized security measures for their safety; and
2. Staff can readily unlock such doors at all times.